

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-06 COME-00 EB-07 LAB-04 SIL-01 /080 W
-----071837Z 099280 /43

R 071356Z JUN 77
FM AMEMBASSY VALLETTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7432
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
USMISSION USNATO
USCINCEUR
USDOCOSOUTH

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USCINCEUR AND USDOCOSOUTH FOR POLADS

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, MT
SUBJECT: MINTOFF TAKES ON THE MALTESE MEDICAL PROFESSION

1. DURING THE PAST WEEK, MALTA HAS BEEN THE SCENE OF AN INCREASINGLY BITTER DISPUTE BETWEEN MINTOFF'S LABOR GOVERNMENT AND THE MALTESE MEDICAL ASSOCIATION. WHAT BEGAN AS A DISAGREEMENT OVER METHODS TO ASSURE AN ADEQUATE NUMBER OF INTERNS AT SEVERAL GOVERNMENT-RUN HOSPITALS HAS ESCALATED TO THE POINT OF A LIMITED STRIKE BY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION MEMBERS, FOLLOWED BY A RETALIATORY LOCK-OUT OF THE STRIKING DOCTORS BY THE GOVERNMENT AND "EMERGENCY" LEGISLATION PASSED BY PARLIAMENT GIVING MINTOFF'S MINISTER OF HEALTH AUTHORITY TO CONTROL THE LICENSING OF ALL GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE
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MEDICAL FACILITIES IN THE COUNTRY.

2. THE ISSUES IN THE DISPUTE ARE LESS IMPORTANT THAN THE EFFECT ON THE AVERAGE CITIZEN, AND AS THE TEMPER ON BOTH SIDES HAVE RISEN, THERE HAS BEEN A GENERAL CALL FOR REASONABLENESS AND NEGOTIATION TO RESTORE MALTA'S HEALTH SERVICES TO NORMAL AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. IN TYPICAL MALTESE

FASHION, HOWEVER, THE WHOLE AFFAIR HAS BEEN DISTORTED INTO STILL ANOTHER POLITICAL DISPUTE, WITH THE LABOR GOVERNMENT (AND SOME 14 LABOR-ORIENTED DOCTORS -- SEVERAL OF WHOM ARE LABOR PARLIAMENTARIANS) LINED UP AGAINST THE 300-ODD MEMBERS OF THE MEDICAL ASSOCIATION AND (BY INDIRECTION) THE OPPOSITION NATIONALIST PARTY. ALTHOUGH THE OPPOSITION HAS NOT OFFICIALLY EMBRACED THE DOCTOR'S CAUSE, AND EVEN ATTEMPTED TO INTERJECT A DEGREE OF REALISM AND RATIONALITY INTO THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE ON MINTOFF'S "EMERGENCY" LEGISLATION, THE MORE RABID LABOR PARTISANS SEE THIS AS ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF THE PROFESSIONAL CLASSES IN MALTA JOINING WITH THE NATIONALISTS AGAINST THE "INTERESTS OF THE WORKING MAN" AND FRUSTRATING THE "WILL OF THE MAJORITY" AS EXPRESSED IN THE 1976 ELECTIONS.

3. THE MOST INTERESTING ASPECT OF MINTOFF'S ACTIONS IN THIS DISPUTE HAS BEEN HIS EXTRAORDINARY EFFORT TO OBTAIN ASSISTANCE FROM MOST OF THE EMBASSIES RESIDENT IN MALTA TO BREAK THE STRIKE. WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE ISRAELI AND THE AMERICAN EMBASSIES, ALL OF THE OTHERS HAVE BEEN ASKED TO RUSH DOCTORS TO MALTA "FOR HUMANITARIAN REASONS" TO HELP KEEP THE GOVERNMENT-RUN HOSPITALS OPEN. INDICATIVE OF THE VEHEMENCE OF MINTOFF'S FEELINGS ON THIS SCORE WAS THE FACT THAT SEVERAL AMBASSADORS WERE AWAKENED AT 3:00 A.M. BY POLICEMENT TO DELIVER THE LABOR GOVERNMENT'S REQUEST FOR SUCH ASSISTANCE.

4. TO DATE, THE ONLY POSITIVE RESPONSE HAS BEEN FROM THE LIBYANS, WHO HAVE SENT TEN DOCTORS FROM TRIPOLI TO ASSIST LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MINTOFF, ALTHOUGH SEVERAL OTHERS HAVE PROMISED TO COME FROM CYPRUS, ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS. WE ALSO UNDERSTAND A GROUP OF EGYPTIAN DOCTORS MAY COME AS WELL.

5. FOR THE MOMENT, THE SITUATION SEEMS RELATIVELY CALM, WITH PRIVATE HOSPITALS CONTINUING TO OPERATE, AND WITH THE PRO-LABOR DOCTORS AND THE LIBYANS MANNING THE GOVERNMENT HOSPITALS. WITH MINTOFF LEAVING FOR THE COMMONWEALTH CONFERENCE IN LONDON AND NOT EXPECTED TO RETURN FOR ABOUT TEN DAYS, HOPEFULLY AN ACCEPTABLE COMPROMISE CAN BE REACHED TO SETTLE THE STRIKE/LOCK-OUT DURING HIS ABSENCE.

6. COMMENT: THE MEDICAL ASSOCIATION IS AN OLD MINTOFF NEMESIS, AND HE DID NOT HESITATE TO LASH BACK WHEN THEY REJECTED HIS GOVERNMENT'S IDEAS FOR STAFFING THE STATE-RUN HOSPITALS. THERE ARE SOME MALTESE WHO THINK THIS ENTIRE EPISODE IS A THINLY-DISGUISED FIGHT OVER THE PLANNED NATIONALIZATION OF ALL HEALTH FACILITIES BY THE LABOR GOVERNMENT. IN ANY EVENT, MINTOFF'S EFFORT TO OBTAIN

FOREIGN DOCTORS TO BREAK THE STRIKE IS AN IRONIC ACTION
BY A MAN WHO HAS MADE A POLITICAL CAREER OUT OF
DENOUNCING "FOREIGN" CONTROL AND INFLUENCE IN MALTA, WHILE
EXTOLLING "MALTA FOR THE MALTESE" AT EVERY OPPORTUNITY.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: DISPUTES, UNION GOVERNMENT RELATIONS, MEDICAL PERSONNEL, REPORTS
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Sent Date: 07-Jun-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
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Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
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Format: TEL
From: VALLETTA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770681/aaaacsyu.tel
Line Count: 121
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 8b193a83-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 07-Mar-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2241201
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MINTOFF TAKES ON THE MALTESE MEDICAL PROFESSION
TAGS: PINT, MT, (MINTOFF, DOMINIC)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/8b193a83-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009